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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4222
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001513

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LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF TOP DAILY ATTACKED FOR PROVOCATIVE
STATEMENTS TO VISITING CODEL

REF: KUWAIT 225

1. (SBU) Summary and recommendation: Jassem Boodai, the Editor-In-Chief of Kuwait's leading Arabic daily, Al-Rai Al-Aam, is being attacked by Kuwaiti bloggers and at least one newspaper for remarks he made to a visiting Codel on January 20. Boodai himself is not facing charges. He may be called as a witness in an investigation of the newspaper that attacked him, which is being investigated for publishing its account of remarks Boodai made that are deemed insulting to the Amir. The Ambassador spoke to Boodai on May 2. Boodai said, "the matter is under control; almost everyone in Kuwait is ignoring it; by next week it will be history." He counseled against any Administration or Congressional involvement in the issue. We will continue to monitor the matter, and concur with Boodai that we avoid giving the issue any undue prominence.

If asked by press, we suggest guidance making the following points:

-- We are aware that remarks made by the editor of a Kuwaiti newspaper to a visiting Congressional delegation have provoked some discussion in Kuwaiti media circles. We understand that characterization of those remarks in a Kuwaiti newspaper has resulted in an investigation. Our Embassy in Kuwait is monitoring the matter.

If asked if there are charges against Jassem Boodai: Our Embassy checked and there are no charges against him.

End Summary and recommendation.

2. (SBU) On January 20, Al-Rai Al-Aam editor Jassem Boodai met with a visiting Codel. The meeting was taped by a CSPAN videographer accompanying the delegation. We understand that a film including the meeting with Boodai was subsequently aired on C-SPAN 2. Portions of the Boodai meeting were then downloaded and circulated on the internet by unknown bloggers. On April 23, a small Kuwaiti newspaper, Al-Shaab, attacked Boodai for remarks he made in the meeting. On April 30, Boodai wrote a lengthy commentary in his own paper responding to the bloggers and the Al-Shaab attack. He apologized for some of his comments. (Boodai spoke with an Embassy FSN on April 29 to verify his recollection that he had asked that his remarks be on background.) Otherwise, Embassy was not aware until his article appeared on April 30 that he was on the defensive over the January 20 meeting. PAO spoke to him on April 30 and he said he was not concerned about the attacks.) Ambassador spoke with Boodai on 2 May. He was in good spirits and attributed the whole issue to a continuation of attacks on him for his outspoken views about succession issues earlier in the year. He said that no case was being brought against him. He welcomed further meetings with visiting officials and Congressional delegations.

3. (SBU) Boodai's filmed comments were provocative, as is his style. He asserted that the Burgan oil field (Kuwait's largest) was the real ruler of Kuwait, that the then expected Amir was too old, and that Kuwaiti women would rather shop than exercise their newly-won right to vote. Kuwaiti bloggers picked up on these remarks and posted links to

the full C-Span video of the meeting on their websites. Although many (but not all) of the bloggers are critical of Al-Boodai, there is no criticism of the Codel or the Embassy for Al-Boodai's remarks which are clearly his expressions of opinion.

¶4. (SBU) The Public Prosecutor has accused Al-Shaab of violating the recently-passed Press and Publications law by publishing statements undermining the authority of the ruling family in its attacks on Al-Boodai and Al-Rai Al-Aam.

¶5. (SBU) In his April 30 response, Boodai took responsibility for his careless comments, but claimed he stated the meeting was Qon background,Q and he was thus surprised when it showed up three months later. He accused rivals of publishing the story Qto settle personal vendettasQ and to undermine his reputation.

¶6. (SBU) On April 30, PA Chief called the C-SPAN videographer to verify that the meeting was aired and to determine his understanding of the meetingQs ground rules. The video operator claimed he was never informed that the meeting was Qon backgroundQ and noted that Al-Boodai never asked him to stop filming. He said C-SPAN 2 aired the program twice, then posted the interview on the Internet in a non-downloadable streaming format.

¶8. (SBU) Begin informal translation of text of Al-Boodai's April 30 editorial in Al-Rai Al-Aam:

Suddenly, it became a topic for public discussion. In a closed meeting with American representatives a month ago (sic) it was discussed and now it is being used to hand out accusations and a means for settling personal vendettas on behalf of others. Last January, I had a discussion with a group of American representatives in my office, some colleagues were present and the title of the discussion was American-Arab relations, in general, and American-Kuwaiti relations, in

KUWAIT 00001513 002 OF 002

particular. My guests requested that the discussion be private and closed. They recorded it for their own archives, as they said, and to guarantee a high-level of honesty as they were accustomed to after meeting Kuwaiti politicians or those in the public field. Then, a portion of our discussion was leaked to an internet site and officials from the American Embassy in Kuwait called to apologize (sic), not only for publishing the discussion, but also for the selectivity of the publishing process. Information was mixed and conversation was reported incorrectly and it appeared as it was an island without precedence or future. Months after this incident a media and non-media machine appears to be out to settle some personal matters. What is under the surface is much deeper than that. This machine discussed us daily and weekly in a personal manner before the visit of the American representatives and after, while we, our friends, loved ones, and loyal Kuwaitis did not pay it much attention. Now what happened during the last few days crossed the personal lines into the realm of Kuwait, its government, its symbols, and its people; a matter which calls for a halt.

First, yes there was an open discussion in a closed session as is previously mentioned which discussed American-Kuwaiti affairs and American political mistakes in the region and some of Kuwait's mistakes towards reform, democracy, and the development of political life. In an open discussion as we were taught through Kuwaiti democratic practices, from diwanias to the highest levels of decision-makers, many things were said as a result of thinking out loud, some of it to shine a light on a problem, and mostly to lure a clear, non-diplomatic response. While all of this is taking place there may be a little exaggeration or a not-so-appropriate word may be used, but these remain within the walls of the room where the meeting took place. It is wrong then for an entity to publish the discussion and it is extremely wrong for an entity to publish parts of the discussion to manipulate the meaning. This is the part that we courageously take responsibility for not paying enough attention to, and the guests realistically take responsibility for publishing and partitioning it.

Second, as we have already stated the discussion took place many months ago and was revived anew today in Kuwait for goals that surpass assaulting us personally and these reasons are known to our friends and the true movers of these reasons. What they published of statements

made publicized the offense and it was all under the excuse of getting at us personally.

Third, I repeat that I courageously take responsibility for any mistakes during the discussion and I apologize to every Kuwaiti starting with His Highness the Amir, may God preserve him, in case he was upset over what was published. Kuwait is my country and Kuwaitis are my people and the political system here is reason for pride and I need no one's testimony to that. The apology is also extended to our brothers, friends, and neighbors whom the campaign against us insisted in misrepresenting our respectful and appreciative position towards.

Fourth, despite the fact that those who published were referred to the prosecutor, since my name was mentioned in the paperwork, that gives me an opportunity to stand before a judge and state my role and clarify the entire incident. The judiciary is Kuwait's armor and its ultimate protector; it keeps all entities in line and protects its democracy.

I will also go to court in order to maintain my personal rights in the midst of this long series of slandering that has not relented for a over a year.

Fifth, we all see the personal envy coming from certain entities for a long time now. This envy has materialized in attacks and accusations, and reached as far as handing out printed materials at night the origins of which were known for their weak, language, weak personalities, and clear fingerprint. But, the last thing I anticipated was that they would be so blinded by envy that they would move from precise attacks to random attacks. The resulting shrapnel crossed the lines of our organization to the country, the people, and the symbols whom we respect and adore. These random attacks have reached so far that those behind them have mentioned the name of His Highness our Amir, may God preserve him.

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